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SUBJECT: REPORT NUMBER THREE ON INTERAGENCY POLICY COMMITTEE (IPC)
BENCHMARKS FOR SRI LANKA

REF: A) Colombo 753 B) State 69689 C) Colombo 691
D) Colombo 854

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) This is the third of three monthly reports on the Government of Sri Lanka's progress in meeting benchmarks, as outlined in Ref B. With a policy dialogue more focused on freedom of movement and issues associated with closed IDP camps, this report is shorter than its predecessors and focused on changes since the August report. Information is provided by UN and INGO partners.

The monsoonal rains for Vavuniya District (location of Manik Farm closed IDP camp complex), predicted to start in October, have not yet begun. Nonetheless, infrastructure improvements - primarily drainage - continue apace in anticipation of heavy rains that could last as long as three or four months. Citing continuing security and safety (de-mining) concerns, the Government remains behind schedule in relation to its predictions regarding early releases from Manik Farm and other closed camps.

Frustration among the international community is growing, in light of this slow progress and apparent unwillingness on the part of the GSL to engage donors and implementing partners in a constructive, strategic dialogue concerning de-mining, releases of IDPs to host families or other options, and returns/resettlement of IDPs to their homes of origin.

Over the past weeks, in an apparent effort by the GSL to show progress in de-congesting Manik Farm and returning IDPs home, a new issue has emerged: closed transit camps. In the short-term, many predict that a normal or heavy monsoon season will cause major disruptions in Manik Farm. In the medium to long term, it is becoming increasingly apparent that returns/resettlement are likely to take at least two years to complete, given the current slow pace in opening the Vanni to de-mining and reconstruction work.

12. (SBU) ENSURING LIVEABLE CONDITIONS IN IDP CAMPS

a. Benchmark: Acute humanitarian needs are met with dignity. Key areas are food, water/sanitation, health, shelter, and protection.

Status: Acute humanitarian needs are being met, although some sectors are not up to SPHERE's standards. In Manik Farm, the major focus is on building drainage works to drain anticipated heavy rains during the October - January monsoon season. However, an oft-heard opinion among the international community is that these prophylactic measures will be insufficient in the event of severe weather. In a recent press release, a UNHCR official stated: "Additional efforts are urgently needed to decongest overcrowded camps, particularly as the monsoon season approaches. The rains will lead to flooding of low lying areas of the camps, causing further deterioration of living conditions and posing possible threats to IDPs' health and safety." The UN has advised the GSL that, in the event of a large-scale natural disaster such as a cyclone, the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) will be the only organization able to respond, to move IDPs to safety and to help with emergency services.

Food (WFP report). By September 10th, NGOs ran out of funds to provide communal cooking and complementary rations. WFP now distributes the basic, dry ration directly to all families in all the zones of Manik Farm. Issues related to individual, family cooking continue to be fire danger and access to fuel wood. The Vavuniya NGO consortium undertook a food security vulnerability assessment in September, identifying almost 60,000 people who are considered vulnerable and in need of complementary food resources, over and above the dry ration distribution. Two NGOs provide cooked meals to the IDPs in the two staging areas of Vavuniya, before they proceed to their districts of origin.

Water and Sanitation. UNICEF undertook a groundwater table survey during September. In many areas of Manik Farm, it is predicted that the water tables may rise several meters during the monsoon season, possibly up to ground surface level. This will require de-commissioning of latrines where inundation would otherwise spread contamination. UNICEF predicts that up to 65,000 people will be affected by rising groundwater, especially in Zones 1, 4, and 5 of Manik Farm, and in a smaller IDP camp nearby. People in low-lying areas of Manik Farm will be moved to tents vacated by IDP families that have been released for returns/resettlement.

Health. As the Manik Farm complex expands to include Zones 6A, 6B, 7, and 8, additional health facilities - such as primary health care centers - are being constructed. There continues to be a shortage of trained medical staff to deal with IDP needs, with some people having to wait several days for a routine consultation. In Zone 2 of Manik Farm, for example, there are five doctors for approximately 55,000 IDPs.

Shelter. Shelter maintenance activities, in preparation for the monsoon season, are ongoing.

Protection. The major protection issues are concerned with closed camps (and new, closed transit sites), the everyday limitations of vulnerable groups (especially the elderly and handicapped), family reunifications, and over-crowding. Protection work is constrained, due to restrictions on interaction with IDPs. Generally, organized meetings with IDPs, and assessments by international organizations are not permitted by the SLA. A widely reported altercation between IDPs and the military on September 26 resulted in weapons being fired and civilians wounded.

b. Benchmark: The Sri Lankan Army is withdrawn to the external periphery of camps and local police provide law and order within camps.

Status: No change since last report.

c. Benchmark: Civilian government agents are placed in charge of IDP camps.

Status: Decision-making processes remain with the SLA, with most decisions regarding camp management requiring the approval of military authorities. IDP protests and demonstrations inside the

camps have been dealt with by military officers, instead of by civilian police officers.

13. (SBU) ENSURING ACCESS TO INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDP) CAMPS.

a. Benchmark: If the GSL cannot provide adequate goods and services within the camps, the GSL facilitates the provision of donor-funded goods and services to meet humanitarian needs.

Status: No change since the last report. Access to existing, closed camps (like Manik Farm) is improving, though some case-by-case delays occur. The Human Rights Commission has limited access to the IDP camps in Vavuniya, but better access in Pulmoddai. Access for the UN to new transit sites is inconsistent, with some sites (for example, in Trincomalee) totally restricted.

b. Benchmark: The GSL provides reasonable permission and access for donors and implementing partners, such as the UNHCR, ICRC, and NGOs, to monitor distribution of donor-funded goods, programs and services in camps.

Status: No change since the last report. ICRC does not have access to camps for IDPs or for LTTE ex-combatant surrenderees.

c. Benchmark: The GSL provides permission and access for international organizations and implementing partners to address protection issues.

Status: There is access for some protection agencies, though more than short interviews with IDPs is difficult.

14. (SBU) FULLEST POSSIBLE REGISTRATION OF IDPs

a. Benchmark: The GSL completes a database of all IDPs and shares the database with the United Nations.

Status: As of September 24, 174,000 people had been registered for their IDP cards, and 120,000 cards had been printed.

b. Benchmark: ID cards and other documents are issued to IDPs with safeguards to prevent corruption.

Status: Except for the number of IDP cards, no change since the last report.

c. Benchmark: All possible family reunifications take place.

Status: No change since the last report.

15. (SBU) EFFECTIVE DISPOSITION OF COMBATANTS

a. Benchmark: Combatants are identified, disarmed, and separated from the general IDP population.

Status: No change since the last report. The GSL continues to use the excuse of ex-combatants in IDP camps as the primary reason for not allowing freedom of movement. There are approximately 10,500 adult ex-combatants in 13 sites.

b. Benchmark: A formal process of demobilization, in line with international commitments, is initiated.

Status: IOM is working with the Commissioner General for Reconciliation and the Ministry of Justice to carry out a socio-economic profiling of surrenderees in the 13 sites. So far, neither IOM nor ICRC has been allowed access to any of these sites.

c. Benchmark: No new children are recruited and previous child soldiers are identified, separated, and put into a UN program.

Status: There are 456 LTTE child surrenderees in Poothodam Rehabilitation Center, in Vavuniya District. Of these, 454 have been produced before the magistrate, and probation officers have started compiling social inquiry reports. 98 boys and 100 girls have begun formal education, in classes from Grade 8 through the A

levels. Play activities and counseling are ongoing within the center.

16. (SBU) RELEASE OF "NO-RISK" POPULATIONS

a. Benchmark: The GSL establishes criteria to define "no-risk" IDPs, in addition to the elderly and disabled.

Status: No change since the last report.

b. Benchmark: Release of "no-risk" IDPs to host families and communities continues at an acceptable pace (on track for 25% - 50% by the end of calendar 2009).

Status: As of September 24, 7,835 people have been released from camps to host families and elders' homes. The majority are elders, people with learning disabilities, and other vulnerable groups.

17. (SBU) ESTABLISHING AN IDP RETURNS PROCESS

a. Benchmark: The GSL widely communicates a voluntary returns strategy for the North, including for IDPs.

Status: The GSL continues to publicly forecast numbers of IDP returnees far in excess of reality. To date, the GSL has not coordinated with, or presented to, the international humanitarian community a realistic returns strategy that includes timeframes, numbers of people, and destinations (places of return).

b. Benchmark: The GSL begins voluntary returns to areas of high priority.

Status: The GSL has not yet begun voluntary returns in significant numbers. Between August 5 and September 28, 6,813 people have returned to Jaffna, Vavuniya, Mannar, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Ampara Districts. Between September 11-28, 3,358 people have been released (most from Manik Farm) to their districts of origin, where they have been detained in closed transit sites, due to security clearance procedures in the districts of origin. Slowly, some of these people are being allowed to leave the transit sites and return home. Limited or no access to these transit sites is provided by the GSL to the UN and other humanitarian agencies.

18. (SBU) CONDUCTING DEMINING ACTIVITIES

a. Benchmark: The GSL releases a mine action strategy for Mannar and continues surveys for the remaining areas in the North by July 15, 2009.

Status: The GSL has not released a comprehensive mine action strategy for the North, citing ongoing security concerns in the Vanni, especially in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts east of the A-9 highway. However, there has been steady on-the-ground progress by district mine action offices and Government agents in issuing more de-mining tasks to mine action agencies, including the four USG partners. This past week, one agency (Halo Trust) received task orders to begin survey work in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, in districts west of the A-9 highway. The U.S. Embassy is working with its partners to develop work plans that will project de-mining work (survey and minefield clearance) through July 2010.

b. Benchmark: Demining begins in support of areas of high priority for IDP returns by August 15, 2009.

Status: Demining operations are underway in Jaffna, Mannar, and Vavuniya Districts, and survey work is also being started in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts. The GSL is particularly focused on the Rice Bowl in Mannar District, requesting that work be completed by mid-October, in time for displaced people to return home and begin paddy cultivation (to coincide with the start of the monsoon season). Although it is assumed that all de-mining operations are related to IDP returns/resettlement, the GSL does not indicate - with each de-mining task order - how many people are to be affected by completion of the work.

c. Benchmark: The GSL coordinates with international and local demining organizations on surveys and mine removal efforts.

Status: Coordination is slowly improving at the field level. At the national level - where all the major decisions are made (by the Presidential Task Force) - there is no coordination between the GSL and the international community. Meetings between the Task Force and mine action agencies, and sometimes donors, are ad hoc. The Task Force continues to press the international community for equipment for SLA demining operations.

d. Benchmark: A public information/signage campaign is launched to local communities in mine areas.

Status: UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Education and international and local NGOs to conduct mine risk education in schools and IDP camps.

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